

P 65/3



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A SELF-GUIDED TOUR OF PINE TREE TRAIL

1. These mountains were originally named Las Sierras de Soledad (The Mountains of Solitude) by the early Spanish settlers. In later years, Anglo settlers thought the jagged spires and needles resembled the rows of pipes of a grand church organ; thus the name Organ Mountains.
2. Two species of juniper are found in the Organ Mountains. This one, alligator juniper, is named for its rough bark which resembles alligator skin. The other, one seed juniper, is found at lower elevations.
3. Deer eat this shrub, called mountain mahogany. Wildlife biologists look at the plant for evidence of deer nibbling or browsing which can indicate the size of the deer population. When the deer population is high, mountain mahogany is heavily browsed and takes the shape of a manicured hedge. The plant takes on the coarse, wild shape of the mountain mahogany before you when the deer population is low.
4. This oak tree is infested with mistletoe, a common parasitic plant. This species of mistletoe is widespread in the Organ Mountains and because of its limy green leaves and glistening white berries, it is in demand for Christmas decorations. It is also an important food source for birds.
5. As many as 100 species of prickly pear cactus thrive in the arid regions of North America. Prickly pear is an important food for wildlife throughout its range. People also enjoy jelly made from its fruit.
6. Turpentine bush is named for the pungent smell it produces, which is similar to turpentine. Turpentine, a by-product of crude oil, is not made from this plant.
7. Deer use Wright's silktassel in many of the desert mountain ranges as a preferred source of food. Because of this preference, it is known as an "ice cream" plant.
8. Sideoats grama is one of the many grasses in the Organ Mountains. Gramas are one of the mainstays of the grasslands in the Southwest and furnish more cattle forage than any other plant from the lowlands and dry mesas up to this elevation.
9. Apache plume is one of the more water dependent desert plants. It usually grows along a water course such as this arroyo (a-row-yo). Runoff from rains and melting snow at higher elevations collects in the arroyo, watering the plants growing along its edge.
10. Within a few yards of this stop are at least 5 plants you have learned so far. Can you identify them?
11. Cholla (choy-ya) cactus is related to the prickly pear seen earlier. Cholla spreads chiefly by joints which drop from the plant and take root. The new plants can grow into dense thickets. If you look around the base of this cactus, you can see joints which have fallen from the parent plant.
12. The numerous short, curved thorns like a cat's claw give this bush its name. Cat claw is a member of the sensitive briars, so named because the leaves will slowly close if you brush or stroke them. Be careful of the thorns if you try this.
13. Dead and fallen trees are important to the well-being of this desert community. Many birds, small mammals, and even insects make their homes in dead trees. As the trees decay, they form humus and replenish the soil with the nutrients needed by growing vegetation.
14. Long slender leaves with teeth along the margins distinguish the sotol (sew-toe), a common plant of the Chihuahuan Desert. This particular sotol is being attacked by scale insects. Look closely at the leaves for this gold colored parasite. It could eventually kill this plant.
15. Like the sotol, this Spanish dagger has developed an effective form of protection. The rigid leaves are tipped with sharp, needlelike points that you will long remember if you blunder into one.
16. This plant, like the turpentine bush seen at Stop 6, was named for its smell. Does a crushed leaf tell you why it is called skunkbush sumac? It is also known as squawbush and lemonade berry. The berries can be used to make a lemon flavored tea.
17. This cool spot depends on water from the numerous seeps above you. The year-round water supply supports a variety of lush vegetation, including trees like the cottonwood, black willow, and New Mexico locust. A small oasis like this is an important source of food, water, and cover for wildlife. Be still for a moment; perhaps you can see one of the many birds that frequent this area.

The Pine Tree Trail continues for another 4 miles and will take you through the cool pines below the Organ Needles before looping back to the trailhead.



The Pine Tree Trail is a loop trail and is for hiking only. It starts at an elevation of around 5,700 feet and rises to approximately 6,880 feet at its highest point before looping back down to the trailhead. This trail covers a distance of $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles and takes about 3 hours to walk.

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